

71st Anniversary of the Battle of Midway
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THANKS TO NAVY MEMORIAL – GREAT VENUE, GREAT SUPPORT, GREAT WAY TO APPRECIATE THE NAVY HERE IN DC.

THANK YOU TO MAJOR GENERAL CROLEY, USMC FOR JOINING US, AND TO REAR ADMIRAL BROWN, USCG. I'M PROUD TO BE HERE WITH YOU, ON BEHALF OF THE CNO, TO RECOGNIZE THE 71ST ANNIVERSARY OF THIS GREAT VICTORY AT SEA. THE CNO ASKED ME TO PASS ON HIS BEST WISHES TO YOUR SERVICE CHIEFS.

SAILORS, THE BAND, AND THE HONOR GUARD – YOU LOOK GREAT AND SOUND GREAT – AND LEND SUCH A FITTING TONE TO THIS DIGNIFIED CELEBRATION. THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING TODAY.

FELLOW FLAG OFFICERS, SAILORS, FAMILIES AND GUESTS, WELCOME AND THANK YOU FOR JOINING US TODAY FOR THIS IMPORTANT REMEMBRANCE. A SPECIAL WELCOME TO THE DEFENSE ATTACHES AND NAVAL ATTACHES OF OUR FRIENDS AND PARTNERS. WE DIDN'T FIGHT WWII ALONE, WE HAVE NOT FOUGHT ANY WAR SINCE THEN ALONE, AND WE WILL LIKELY NOT FIGHT ALONE IN THE FUTURE, AND I'M VERY HAPPY THAT YOU JOINED US HERE TODAY.

FINALLY, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, IT IS MY HONOR TO WELCOME OUR MIDWAY VETERANS HERE TO MY LEFT. THEY AND THEIR FAMILIES HAVE ALSO BECOME SUCH A CRITICAL PART OF THIS EVENT EACH YEAR. IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU HERE AGAIN, AND WE ARE FOREVER GRATEFUL FOR THE BRAVERY AND SACRIFICES THAT YOU, YOUR SHIPMATES AND YOUR FAMILIES DEMONSTRATED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PACIFIC OCEAN ON THOSE IMPORTANT DAYS 71 YEARS AGO, AND DURING THE REST OF THE WAR, AND EVERY DAY SINCE. THANKS SO VERY MUCH FOR JOINING US...

IT STRIKES ME THAT WE HOLD CELEBRATIONS LIKE TODAY'S FOR TWO PRIMARY REASONS:

- CERTAINLY IT'S PROPER TO REMEMBER THE HEROISM AND BRAVERY OF ALL WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY IN 1942. IT'S ENTIRELY FITTING THAT WE PAUSE, GET IN OUR DRESS UNIFORMS, AND GATHER INFORMATION TO HONOR THOSE WHO PAID SUCH A HIGH PRICE – SOME THE ULTIMATE PRICE – IN THAT BATTLE.
- BUT WE ALSO WANT TO GO BEYOND MERE REMEMBRANCE, BEYOND JUST HAVING A HISTORY LESSON, AND SOMEHOW MAKE THOSE DAYS “COME ALIVE” AGAIN FOR US HERE TODAY AND THROUGHOUT THE NAVY WORLDWIDE. TO MAKE THAT BATTLE PRESENT AND RELEVANT TO US – PART OF OUR DNA – TO GUIDE US AS WE MOVE FORWARD.

AND WE COULD NOT HAVE PICKED A BETTER BATTLE AT SEA. JOHN KEEGAN, THE EMINENT BRITISH MILITARY HISTORIAN, DESCRIBED MIDWAY AS “THE MOST STUNNING AND DECISIVE BLOW IN THE HISTORY OF NAVAL WARFARE.” NOW THAT'S HIGH PRAISE INDEED COMING FROM A GUY WHO WAS RAISED IN THE SCHOOL OF NELSON AND TRAFALGAR!

HOW DID WE WIN THIS BATTLE? WE WERE OUTNUMBERED – 4 CARRIERS TO 3, THE JAPANESE HAD MORE SHIPS AND MORE AIRCRAFT. SO HOW DID THESE MEN WRITE THIS “GLORIOUS PAGE IN OUR HISTORY?” AS ADMIRAL NIMITZ DESCRIBED IT?

WELL AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL, IT TOOK ALL OF AMERICA. OUR RESILIENCE, CREATIVITY AND INDUSTRIAL CAPACITY HAD ALREADY STARTED TO KICK IN, AND WAS TURNING THE CORNER AFTER PEARL HARBOR, JUST SIX MONTHS EARLIER. WE WERE BUILDING BETTER SHIPS IN BIGGER NUMBERS. MORE TALENTED AND INDUSTRIOUS MECHANICS WERE KEEPING THEM BETTER REPAIRED. MIDWAY BROUGHT FOUR U.S. CARRIERS TOGETHER IN BATTLE FOR THE FIRST TIME –

BY THE END OF 1942, THE U.S. INDUSTRIAL BASE WAS PRODUCING THE IMPROVED ESSEX CLASS CARRIERS AT SUCH A RATE THAT FIGHTING IN GROUPS OF FOUR WAS THE NORM. IN HINDSIGHT, WE SAY, "OF COURSE," BUT THE SPEED OF RECOVERY SURPRISED EVERYBODY, MOST OF ALL THE JAPANESE. ANOTHER EXAMPLE FROM MIDWAY:

USS YORKTOWN WAS SO HEAVILY DAMAGED AT THE BATTLE OF CORAL SEA, JUST A MONTH BEFORE MIDWAY, THAT SHE WAS INITIALLY BELIEVED BY THE JAPANESE TO BE SUNK. BUT SHE MADE IT TO THE PHNSY FOR REPAIRS. NO ONE EXPECTED HER TO RETURN FOR MONTHS, BUT NIMITZ NEEDED EVERY CARRIER HE COULD GET AND PHNSY PULLED OFF A MIRACLE, WORKING DAY AND NIGHT TO PATCH HER BACK TOGETHER AND IN THREE DAYS THERE SHE WAS – BACK IN THE FIGHT AT MIDWAY.

AS THE BATTLE RAGED, YORKTOWN WAS HIT HARD AGAIN, AND AGAIN BELIEVED TO BE SUNK. BUT HER CREW KEPT HER TOGETHER AT SEA – SO MUCH SO THAT THE NEXT DAY SHE LOOKED AND FOUGHT LIKE A BRAND NEW CARRIER! WHEN THE JAPANESE CAME BACK FOR A RE-ATTACK, THEY THOUGHT THEY WERE ATTACKING A SECOND CARRIER, BUT THEY WERE ACTUALLY ATTACKING YORKTOWN AGAIN.

AGAIN THEY HIT HER SO HARD THAT THEY BELIEVED THAT THE CARRIER WAS LOST – SO THE JAPANESE TOOK CREDIT FOR TWO CARRIERS SUNK, WHEN ACTUALLY THEY HAD NOT SUNK ONE. YORKTOWN WAS STILL IN THE FIGHT, AND IT TOOK A THIRD ATTACK TO FINALLY PUT HER OUT OF SERVICE AND UNDER THE WAVES.

BY CONTRAST, TWO JAPANESE CARRIERS DAMAGED AT CORAL SEA WERE STILL IN JAPANESE SHIPYARDS WAITING TO GET BACK TO SEA. AS WELL, THERE WERE INCREASINGLY FEWER AIRCRAFT – AND REPAIR PARTS - TO REPLACE LOSSES. THEY WERE UNABLE TO RECOVER AND BRING THAT FORCE TO BEAR.

AND THOUGH WE STARTED OFF OUTNUMBERED IN CARRIERS, THE ISLAND OF MIDWAY ITSELF HELPED TO BALANCE THE SCORE! UNDER COMBAT, THE TEAM HAD ADAPTED QUICKLY AND WAS GETTING PRETTY GOOD AT COMBINED ARMS. THE USMC FIGHTER PILOTS STATIONED ON MIDWAY ISLAND FOUGHT A FIERCE BATTLE, NOT ONLY DEFENDING THE ISLAND FROM BEING TAKEN, BUT ALSO ATTACKING THE JAPANESE FORCE AT SEA. SO WE HAD A SORT OF 4TH CARRIER AS WELL.

AT THE OPERATIONAL LEVEL, ADM NIMITZ HAD A SIMPLE AND EFFECTIVE PLAN – MASS FORCES IN THE CENTRAL PACIFIC AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE ENEMY'S DISPERSION OF FORCES. NIMITZ ALSO HAD ABSOLUTE FAITH AND CONFIDENCE IN HIS COMMANDERS, FLETCHER AND SPRUANCE. AND HE PROVIDED THESE LEADERS PERFECT GUIDANCE – GET THE ENEMY TO COME OUT AND FIGHT, AND THEN ENGAGE. BUT ALSO IN THAT GUIDANCE, HE PRECISELY PROVIDED HIS INTENTIONS WITH RESPECT TO WHAT THE COMMANDERS WERE TO DO, HOW THEY SHOULD DO IT, AND WHAT CONSTITUTED ACCEPTABLE RISK.

AGAIN, THE ISLAND OF MIDWAY, WITH ITS MARINE GARRISON ON THE GROUND WAS CRUCIAL – WHEN LTCOL SHANNON SAID HE WOULD HOLD MIDWAY, NIMITZ TOOK HIM ON HIS WORD, AND SENT HIM JUST THE FORCES HE NEEDED, WITH THE BULK OF HIS FORCES SENT TO FIGHT THE JAPANESE CARRIERS. THIS COMBINATION OF FAITH IN HIS COMMANDERS AND SUCCINCT COMMANDER'S GUIDANCE ALLOWED ADM NIMITZ TO COMMAND FROM HIS HEADQUARTERS IN PEARL HARBOR, WHERE HE HAD ACCESS TO VASTLY SUPERIOR INFORMATION (INCLUDING THE JAPANESE CODED MESSAGES THAT WE HAD BROKEN) TO EXERCISE HIS VERSION OF COMMAND CONTROL. THIS LEFT FLETCHER AND SPRUANCE TO SEIZE THE FLEETING OPPORTUNITIES THAT ONLY THEY WOULD SEE.

BY CONTRAST, YAMAMOTO HAD WRITTEN PAGES AND PAGES OF DETAILED ORDERS – ALMOST ALL OF WHICH WERE MOOT WHEN THE FIGHTING BROKE OUT. HIS COMMANDERS WERE SMOTHERED IN MINUTIAE AND THEREFORE LESS EQUIPPED TO ADAPT TO THE CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES IN THE BATTLE. WANTING TO MICROMANAGE THE BATTLE, HE CHOSE TO EMBARK ON THE BATTLESHIP YAMATO WITH THE FLEET TO EXERCISE MORE DIRECT CONTROL. THIS PUT HIM AT A BIG DISADVANTAGE FROM AN INFORMATION STANDPOINT, AND IT COST HIM AND THE WHOLE BATTLE FORCE.

FINALLY, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE BATTLE COULD NOT HAVE BEEN WON WITHOUT THE BRAVE AND CONFIDENT PERFORMANCE OF THE SAILORS, MARINES, AND COASTGUARDSMEN. THEY WERE BETTER TRAINED, MORE ADAPTABLE, AND MORE INGENIOUS. WHEN OPPORTUNITY STRUCK – AND AS ALWAYS IT WAS A STROKE OF LUCK AS MUCH AS ANYTHING – AND IT WAS TIME TO FLY INTO BATTLE, THEY WERE READY. THAT TYPE OF RESPONSE AND PERFORMANCE DOES NOT HAPPEN WITHOUT A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE. SOME OF THESE SAILORS WERE EXPERIENCED FROM THE BATTLE OF CORAL SEA – THEY BROUGHT ALL THOSE LESSONS TO BEAR AT MIDWAY. THEY WERE READY TO SEIZE THE MOMENT WHEN THE ORDER CAME. AND THEY CONTINUED LEARNING ON THE FLY – GENERATING COMBAT SORTIES FASTER AS THE BATTLE WAGED ON.

YORKTOWN, WITH HER EXPERIENCE FROM THE BATTLE OF CORAL SEA, PROVED ABSOLUTELY DECISIVE AT MIDWAY. TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE MATTER, AND IT WAS THESE GENTLEMEN SEATED HERE THAT MADE THEM MATTER. IT WAS THEY WHO TURNED AND SAILED TOWARDS THE SOUND OF GUNFIRE.

- ON WATCH AS THE JUNIOR OFFICER OF THE DECK WHO READ THE FIRST INTELLIGENCE MESSAGE TO THE CO ON THE BRIDGE OF YORKTOWN.
- ON HAWAII WHEN THE PEARL HARBOR ATTACK CAME, AND SURVIVED TO DELIVER AMMUNITION TO THE BATTLE IN MIDWAY.

- SUPPORTED THE BATTLE FROM BENEATH THE WAVES ON SUBMARINES, TAKING DEPTH CHARGES, BUT REPORTING JAPANESE SHIP POSITIONS AND KEEPING THOSE SHIPS UNDER FIRE.
- TOOK THE PICTURES ON YORKTOWN THAT SERVE TO THIS DAY AS THE BEST RECORD OF THAT BATTLE
- WERE ON BOARD HORNET AND ENTERPRISE
- WHO WENT INTO THE WATER WHEN THEIR SHIPS WERE SUNK, TO BE RESCUED BY OTHER SHIPS, COLD AND COVERED IN OIL

ADMIRAL NIMITZ SAID THAT AT MIDWAY, “WE WILL DO THE BEST WE CAN WITH WHAT WE HAVE.” HE DID ALL THAT, AND THESE MEN, THEIR SHIPMATES, AND THE FAMILIES WHO SUPPORTED THEM, WERE INDEED THE VERY BEST, AND THEY DID A GLORIOUS THING AT MIDWAY, TURNING THE COURSE OF THE WAR IN THE PACIFIC. THOUGH THERE WAS PLENTY OF FIGHTING LEFT IN THE WAR, THE JAPANESE WOULD NEVER AGAIN HAVE THE MOMENTUM.

SO TODAY, WE WOULD NOT WANT TO BE ANYWHERE BUT HERE TO RECOGNIZE AND REMEMBER. BUT WE NEED TO GO BEYOND MERE REMEMBRANCE.

IT RELATES TO CURRENT DAY:

- INDUSTRIAL CAPACITY OF OUR NATION TO BUILD OUR DEFENSE
- BOLD AND ACCOUNTABLE LEADERSHIP
- TRAINED AND RESILIENT SAILORS AND FAMILIES

THESE MATTER NOW AS MUCH AS EVER. AS WE SLOG THROUGH THE MIRE OF BUDGET CHALLENGES, WE MUST REMEMBER ALWAYS TO KEEP THESE THINGS INTACT – THEY ARE THE INGREDIENTS FOR PROTECTING AMERICA’S VITAL INTERESTS IN THE WORLD –

BY KEEPING “WARFIGHTING FIRST,” WE DETER CONFLICT, AND IF BY CHANCE THAT DETERRENCE SHOULD FAIL, WE WIN DECISIVELY.

BY “OPERATING FORWARD,” THE LEADERS OF YOUR NAVY, USMC AND USCG TEAM REMAIN BOLD AND ACCOUNTABLE - READY TO RESPOND - WHERE AND WHEN IT MATTERS - TO RESTORE PEACE AND ORDER, OR TO PROVIDE HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE BEFORE THE SITUATION ESCALATES INTO A REAL CRISIS.

BY “BEING READY” THE NAVY AND INDUSTRIAL TEAM BUILD THE BEST SHIPS AND PUT THEM INTO THE HANDS OF THE BEST-TRAINED SAILORS IN THE WORLD.

JUST AS NIMITZ TRUSTED HIS COMMANDERS AND PROVIDED THEM GUIDANCE SO THAT THEY COULD BE MOST EFFECTIVE, SO OUR CNO HAS PROVIDED US HIS GUIDANCE – KEEP WARFIGHTING FIRST, OPERATE FORWARD, AND BE READY.

THAT GUIDANCE, IN THE HANDS OF TRUSTED, BOLD AND ACCOUNTABLE LEADERS, SUPPORTED BY THE WORLD’S BEST TRAINED OPERATORS, SAILING ON THE BEST SHIPS, SUBMARINES AND AIRCRAFT IN THE WORLD – THAT IS HOW WE TRULY HONOR OUR HEROES FROM AMERICA’S GREATEST GENERATION, AND THAT IS HOW WE KEEP THE SPIRIT OF MIDWAY ALIVE TODAY AND INTO THE FUTURE.

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR COMING TODAY, GOD BLESS YOU AND GOD BLESS AMERICA.